

Subcommittee on Energy
Hearing: “Securing our Energy Infrastructure: Legislation to Enhance Pipeline Reliability”
U.S. Rep. Bobby L. Rush (IL-01)
Q&A Transcript
Wednesday January 19, 2021

RUSH: Chairman Glick and Deputy Secretary Turk, again, thank you for joining us today. Chairman Glick, in your testimony, you stated that the lack of mandatory reliability standards, especially for natural gas pipelines, poses a risk to the reliability of the bulk power system in its entirety. You have touched on this topic before, including at FERC open meetings and in the wake of the release of the FERC-NERC joint staff report on the impacts of Winter Storm Uri.

As a quick and unfortunate note, this is the second time in a decade that FERC and NERC have had to issue a joint report on the impacts of winter weather and blackouts in Texas, which we all agree is indeed a tragedy.

Chairman Glick, could you elaborate for us on the threat that a lack of mandatory reliability standards for the natural gas pipeline industry poses to the reliability of the bulk power system — or in other words, how the current lack of standards threatens everyday Americans’ ability to keep the lights on in their home?

GLICK: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman, for the question. As your question noted, I think the best example may again be what happened last February in Texas with regard to winter storm Uri. And recall, we had FERC staff and NERC staff engaged in a joint inquiry, and essentially, there were two major conclusions as to what the causes were for the loss of so much generator capacity, lost about 35,000 megawatts of electric generation capacity in Texas, which is a very significant amount.

One of the causes was the fact that the electric generation plants were not sufficiently weatherized. And a lot of the parts froze, it got very cold as we know, parts froze and they just weren’t operable and those plants had to shut down. But the other major cause was the fact that over 50 percent of the electric generation in Texas was fueled by natural gas — or, is fueled by natural gas. And in large part because either the gas production was reduced because some of the gas processing and production facilities froze, but also because those gas facilities lost electric supply. And because of that, they had to shut down and they weren’t able to provide additional gas. And so, it was essentially a never-ending circle of problems, and that’s what caused the problem.

I think the issue is — and I think the joint inquiry said this best — is that we need to have a system where we ensure reliable sources of fuel for electric generation. And that particularly includes natural gas.

RUSH: Chairman Glick, thank you so much. I do have another question for Deputy Secretary Turk. Thank you so much. If you have any other statements, please share them with us in a letter.

Deputy Secretary Turk, one of my goals as Chair of this Subcommittee has been to push for greater minority employment and representation in the energy and energy-related industries. A study by the International Information System Security Certification Consortium found that only nine percent of workers in the cybersecurity industry were African American.

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Given the DOE’s focus on cybersecurity and the Biden Administration’s policy to cultivate a Federal workforce that draws from the full diversity of the nation, what steps has DOE taken to increase minority employment in its cybersecurity roles?

TURK: Well thank you Mr. Chairman, not only for the question, but for your leadership on this incredibly important issue. And this is a top priority that we share at the Department of Energy — Secretary Granholm, myself, all of us. And we spend a lot of time trying to make sure, not just on cybersecurity but throughout energy, we have an energy workforce at the Department and more broadly, that represents all the talents of everyone around our country.

The nine percent figure that you highlight is just not good enough. We need to do more, we can do more, we should do more, and frankly, we’re going to be more successful on cybersecurity if we do more hiring from the full range of our American talents.

So, we’re doing an awful lot. Let me give you one particular example. We ran a 2021 DOE CyberForce competition. And inviting 21 minority-serving institutions to be fundamentally a part of that, so we can attract more top talent to be part of the cybersecurity solutions going forward. So again, thank you Mr. Chairman, for all your leadership on that issue.